Lady Macbeth And Her Success In Power

William Shakespeare is notoriously known for being one of the greatest playwriters of all time. This all started in 1950, where he wrote and published his first play, Henry VI. From there, Shakespeare went on to write about two plays each year for 20 years. Some of his most famous work includes Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth. When watching or reading Macbeth, there are some notable differences and similarities to Shakespeare's other plays. For example, comparing Hamlet and Macbeth, there are some features to both plays that carry analogous themes, and others, where there are evident discrepancies. A few common points that the two plays share, consist of the classic Elizabethan treachery, violence, and tragedy leading to death. Of course, there are characteristics that make Hamlet and Macbeth particularly distinct, including the social environment of the main characters in each of the plays; in Hamlet, he is companionless and single, whereas, in Macbeth, he is wedded and part of a squad. Also, the behaviorism is quite disparate, seeing as Macbeth is settled on his many decisions in that they are right and just, and Hamlet is indecisive. As the tale of Macbeth carries out, it is common to notice the development of a nefarious and wicked character, Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth's figure revolves around strength and authority, as she manipulates her way to the top. This is palpable in other pieces of Shakespeare's work, such as Twelfth Night's Viola. In this play, Viola is dominant of her position and disguises herself as a man to live with the Duke, in this way, deceiving him. Lady Macbeth emanates power as part of the nature of her character, the miscreant, including the way she influences Macbeth to carry out his plan, her proposal to assassinate Duncan, and her prevailing, superior role as an accomplice throughout the play.

Macbeth was originally published in the Folio of 1623, where it took the stage many years before that in 1606 at the Hampton Court in London, England. From her many actions as the play unfolds, we will see why Lady Macbeth is named one of the most clever villains in all of Elizabethan Literature.

Throughout the play, Lady Macbeth is seen to have a tenacious effect on her husband. This is seen in the first act, where Lady Macbeth is audaciously pushing Macbeth to commit a crime but is unsure if he can handle the responsibility;

"What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;

It is too full o' the milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;

Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,

That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false

And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst have, great Glamis,

That which cries ‘Thus thou must do, if thou have it;

And that which rather thou dost fear to do

Than wishest should be undone.’ Hie thee hither,” (1.5.16-25)

In another piece of scene 5 act 1, Lady Macbeth convinces Macbeth to go through with his plan;

“Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!

Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!

Thy letters have transported me beyond

This ignorant present, and I feel now

The future in the instant.” (1.5.69-63)

Through this segment, Lady Macbeth commences her plan to manipulate Macbeth by quoting his future title and stating that the time is right for them to act now, to have the future they envision. Both of these scenarios begin to show Lady Macbeth’s true colours. Another event in the first act highlights the way Lady Macbeth uses her words to further convince Macbeth to execute the plan;

Lady Macbeth: “Like the poor cat i’ the adage?

Macbeth: Prithee, peace:

I dare do all that may become a man;” (1.7.49-51)

Lady Macbeth uses a proverb, which expresses that a cat would like to catch fish from water, but doesn’t want to get it’s paws wet, implying that Macbeth is the fearful cat. Macbeth replies saying that he will do everything he can to accomplish his plan. This shows that Lady Macbeth has power in this relationship because she uses a feminine approach, such as signifying that Macbeth should do this for them both, which masks her masculine persona, since power was a “man’s trait” in this era.

Lady Macbeth takes her husband’s plan on an incline. While Macbeth had the initial idea, Lady Macbeth was scheming farther than that; to assassinate Duncan indeed.

“The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step

On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap,

For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;

Let not light see my black and deep desires:

The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,

Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.” (1.4.55-60)

In this segment, Macbeth has a moment to himself where he discovers his true feelings for Duncan. This is where the initial idea of murdering Duncan is formed. In another scene, Lady Macbeth comes to the realization that Macbeth is worthy of more than he is, while reading a letter. Composed in this letter is Macbeth telling his wife that the three witches have predicted him King of Scotland. Lady Macbeth then emerges on the same page as Macbeth; the assassination of the current King of Scotland, Duncan.

“All-hailed me ‘Thane of Cawdor,’ by which title,

Before, these weird sisters saluted me, and referred

Me to the coming on of time, with ‘Hail, king that

Shalt be!’ This have I thought good to deliver” (1.5.7-10)

This ties in to Lady Macbeth’s personality. She is known for being clever, which is discovered through scene 5 when she decides to intensify the original plan.

Though Lady Macbeth is not included in certain parts of the play, specifically where important decisions such as murdering Banquo are made, she has an incredibly supportive, yet conniving nature. This is easy to speculate following scene 5 of act 1, where Macbeth’s excitement to share his intentions and ideas with his wife are hinted.

“Thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou

Mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being” (1.5.11-12)

In scene 2 of act 2, Lady Macbeth is willing to assist Macbeth in the murder of Duncan, by drugging his guards.

“Alack, I am afraid they have awaked,

And ‘tis not done. The attempt and not the deed

Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready;

He could not miss ‘em. Had he not resembled

My father as he slept, I had done’t” (2.2.12-16)

In scene 2 of act 3, Macbeth decides to take on the task of Banquo’s murder on his own, which he hides from his wife.

“Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,

Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,” (3.2.51-52)

While this is all happening, later on, Macbeth is close to getting caught, where Lady Macbeth then covers for him. This, once again, shows her appurtenant nature.

“I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse;

Question enrages him. At once, good night:

Stand not upon the order of your going,

But go at once.” (3.4.137-140)

These scenarios demonstrate the supportive, yet suspicious qualities Lady Macbeth possesses.

Lady Macbeth is a character that radiates power as one of her strongest elements, including the way she joins in proposal to murder the King of Scotland, passionately encourages Macbeth to execute his plan, and her assertive, dominant role as an aide to Macbeth’s side. This is evident through many scenes, including her feminine approach to pushing Macbeth to assassinate Duncan, her support when reading the letter from Macbeth, and her contribution to kill Duncan. Lady Macbeth is a well-respected character and villain, showing that she is powerful in an era where powerful women were disregarded.

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